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HOW DOES PLATO SOLVE THE PARADOX OF INQUIRY
IN THE MENO?

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SAGP West, 1985

In this paper I shall focus on a passage in Plato's dialogue, the Meno, that has received wide and serious attention of late. It is that stretch of the Meno (80d-86c) that incorporates Meno's eristic puzzle, the doctrine of recollection, Socrates' interrogation of Meno's slave-boy, and the sequel to that interrogation. I shall try to show that this text is transitional and doubly so, for, on the one hand, within the context of the Meno it marks the transition between the earlier elenchoi concerning the nature of arete and the employment of the method of hypothesis concerning whether arete is teachable and, on the other, within the early and middle dialogues as a whole it marks the transition between largely elenctic, Socratic inquiries and Platonic discussions with greater epistemological and metaphysical weight. This latter claim is controversial in a way that the earlier one, about the text's transitional role in the dialogue, is not, but the claim is defensible in a way that I shall try to demonstrate in subsequent sections of this paper.

THE PARADOX OF INQUIRY

At Meno 80d a frustrated Meno tries to stall his conversation with Socrates by setting up a roadblock. If you do not know something, he asks, how can one search for it? For if you don't know it, either you can't set it up as the object of your search or, even if one could, you wouldn't know that what you found is what you were looking for. Socrates acknowledges the gambit as a familiar one, though his own reformulation of the puzzle differs from Meno's version in an important way. To Meno, the puzzle about inquiry or searching is a dilemma about how, given an original ignorance, one can either begin or conclude a search. To Socrates, the puzzle is a dilemma about initiating such a search; to begin with knowledge of the object sought makes searching for it unnecessary (and perhaps impossible) and to begin without knowledge of it makes searching impossible to initiate. So for Meno the problem concerns the unacceptable consequences of initial ignorance; for Socrates it concerns, more radically, the impasse that results from either initial knowing or initial ignorance. Since it is Socrates' version that is addressed in the text that follows, we shall concern ourselves with it alone.

Many commentators, among them Grube, Burnet, Shorey, Ritter, and Taylor, treat the puzzle lightly as comic relief or a mere interlude, the dramatic setting into which the doctrine of recollection is introduced but itself of no serious import. But other commentators, including Cornford, Bluck, Phillips, Moravcsik, Irwin, White, and Allen, agree that the puzzle is

important in itself, although they are not always sensitive to the differences between Meno's version and Socrates' restatement.

The issue about the puzzle's seriousness is not a minor one. Socrates recalls the doctrine of recollection because he is seeking a solution to the current paradox. If the paradox is a dramatic interlude with no real philosophical role to play, then one must look elsewhere for the genuine difficulties which the doctrine of recollection is intended to address. On the other hand, if the paradox is a serious one and the real reason for introducing the doctrine of recollection, then what that doctrine is and how it should be understood will depend upon how it solves the paradox. And in so far as the doctrine has implications for Plato's epistemology and the stage it has reached by the time the Meno was written, the paradox begins to take on greater significance still.

It is both plausible that Plato intended the paradox of inquiry as a serious puzzle and likely that he did so. First, this would not be the only case where an eristic puzzle played a serious philosophical role for Plato. While the Euthydemus is a collection of sophistical puzzles and paradoxes that are not typically addressed in that dialogue as serious philosophical problems, other dialogues show Plato wrestling with sophistical puzzles with great concern and with impressive results. The paradoxes about contradiction and relativism in the Cratylus come to mind, as do the puzzles about aitiai in the Phaedo and the paradox of philosophical rule in the Republic. Not all of these, of course, can be confirmed as conventional eristic tropes, but some surely can be. Most impressive of all in this genre are the puzzles about false belief and false speech that generate such rich results in the Cratylus, Theaetetus, and Sophist. This last case by itself would stand as dramatic evidence that a commonplace eristic puzzle could take on grand importance for Plato and stimulate his own philosophical inquiries in very significant ways.

Secondly, the current puzzle, because of its specific content, does have serious implications for Plato and his Socratic inheritance. Socrates' reformulation is an attempt to argue that inquiry is impossible. But if that were true, the result would be some form of skepticism, relativism, or some whimsical, unsystematic acquisition of moral knowledge. These would not be welcome alternatives to Socrates or Plato and hence the challenge of the puzzle would not have been viewed as a facile one. Furthermore, in so far as moral knowledge is necessary for human excellence and thereby for human well-being, the puzzle is of momentous importance. For Socratic dialectic is both a check on whether one has such moral knowledge and a method for acquiring it. But, if true, the paradox destroys the possibility of Socratic inquiry and thereby the possibility of either confirming one's moral knowledge or acquiring it.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECOLLECTION AND THE SOLUTION TO THE PARADOX

At 86c Socrates says, "...we are agreed that it is right to inquire into something that one does not know." This statement shows that somewhere between 81a and 86c the paradox had been solved. But what is the solution, and how does it work?

Those who read Guthrie, Cornford, Allen, and Bluck, among others, will find there what we might call the "traditional view." According to this view, the paradox is a dilemma about one's epistemic resources at the outset of inquiry and the role those resources play at the inquiry's conclusion. The alternatives that the dilemma proposes are beginning with (1) total, explicit knowledge or with (2) absolute ignorance. The doctrine of recollection provides the solution with its proposal that all inquiry begins with something intermediate between (1) and (2): latent, unconscious, or implicit knowledge. When these commentators speak of "total knowledge," they seem to have in mind "self-consciously clear" or "conscious" knowledge. They speak of implicit knowledge being aroused or made explicit -- presumably by a process akin to the questioning that Meno's slave-boy undergoes.

The traditional view, as we have it, is flawed by imprecision, weak or nonexistent argument, and faulty assumptions. No attempt is made to clarify whether (1) and (2) concern the object of knowledge or the act of knowing in some occurrent sense, to clarify, that is, what exactly the paradox is about and what a solution ought to provide. No attempt is made to examine the text carefully and systematically in order to defend the accuracy of the proposal. It is assumed rather than argued that Plato means explicit knowledge or complete ignorance, that the slave-boy interrogation is evidence for the doctrine of recollection and not an illustration of it, that learning is intended by Plato to be identical with and not similar to recollection, and that the kind of knowledge at issue is exclusively a priori. And there is tendency, not always made explicit, to read the Phaedo account of recollection uncritically back into the Meno. These are substantial difficulties and while they do not of course refute the traditional conclusion, they do weaken the case for it.

Recent treatments, notably those of Moravcsik, White, and the brief one by Irwin, remedy many of these deficiencies. They involve penetrating, subtle, and thorough argument and scholarship. Right or wrong, they provide careful examination of what the paradox is and hence what it would take to solve it and scrupulous consideration of the text. These discussions are an excellent foundation for further work.

Rather than simply survey these accounts, let me try to identify their most significant common features and differences. First, they agree that the paradox and hence the doctrine of recollection are not about all kinds of inquiry and learning. Rather they concern only that type of inquiry that is a

searching, and they are about that kind of learning that is the result of an inquiry directed to a goal that is fixed in some way in advance. Both Moravcsik and White emphasize this feature. We might call this "purposive learning," but it is purposive learning with the added condition that the learner must either initiate the learning him or her self or at least have in some way appropriated the task or goal of the learning for himself. In some sense, then, the paradox is about knowing what one is looking for and yet not knowing it yet.

Secondly, Moravcsik, following tradition and Gregory Vlastos in a paper on this subject, believes that the paradox and the doctrine of recollection are solely concerned with a priori knowledge and its acquisition via inquiry. This brings the Meno into line with the Phaedo and the later Platonic employment of the doctrine of recollection; it makes the Meno the initial Platonic statement on an issue of perennial philosophical interest. White and Irwin, however, believe that the text of the Meno is at best indecisive on this restriction and that while the particular context for the paradox and what follows is definitional inquiry, the paradox and doctrine as presented are neutral with respect to their object. Part of their reason for saying this is that neither the dialogue with the slave-boy nor the notion of an aitias logismos, introduced later as the mechanism whereby true belief is converted into knowledge, seem to require a priori objects.

Thirdly, Moravcsik takes recollection to be a metaphor for learning via inquiry. For him, the solution to the paradox is that learning works like remembering. In recall, we apprehend an image, concept, etc. now, after having once apprehended at some earlier time and since forgotten it. Some feature of this activity must account for why it is recall, however, and not simply two distinct apprehensions of the same thing. This feature he calls a mental or physical factor in the rememberer that is causally related to both the original apprehension and the recall. When a new stimulus is experienced, it triggers a recollection because of this "entitative factor" in the rememberer. In learning, a question triggers an analogous factor that issues in understanding and a response. Hence, for Moravcsik the paradox is solved by grabbing both horns of the dilemma: the truths, i.e., sets of concepts or beliefs, are in us, and learning serves to bring them to consciousness. So, in a sense, at the outset of inquiry, the learner does know the answer, and in a sense he or she does not. By treating learning as similar to recall, then, Moravcsik has given us a sophisticated version of the traditional view in which learning a priori truths is like remembering and begins with implicit but not explicit knowledge of those truths.

Fourthly, for White and Irwin, the paradox is about recognition, and because it is about recognition, it is also about reference and identity of reference. How does one recognize a successful outcome of an inquiry already framed? One cannot recognize it without in some sense already having known

it. Self-initiated inquiry and recognition require knowledge of a specification or description that directs the search from the outset. The paradox is this: without knowledge of such a specification, inquiry is impossible, but with such knowledge one already knows what is being sought. White describes a case of searching for a pair of gloves with a specification already in hand and compares it to searching for a Form with a definition in hand. The analogue shows how Plato might have thought that having the specification looks like already having the goal. For White, then, the paradox is very precisely about the epistemic conditions necessary for getting a search or inquiry underway. Now, he asks, can one have a specification of the object of the search without already knowing that object?

The traditional solution, and Moravcsik's as well, has Socrates grab both horns of the dilemma. White disagrees. Plato is wrong, he says, to think that with a specification of the object sought we already have knowledge it. The specification does not refer to the precise object sought but rather to the sort of thing; it applies to the office and not the office-holder, to the position and not the candidate. In short, the second horn of the dilemma is false, and to see this would solve the paradox by dissolving it.

According to White, however, Plato chooses another route. He solves the paradox by denying one horn of the dilemma -- that we do know in a sense, for inquiry is recollection. In the case of inquiry, specification counts as knowledge of the outcome, but in the case of a directed recollection, specification does not count as such knowledge.

Fifthly, Irwin agrees with White but only up to a point. Inquiry is directed search, and the paradox does say that with total ignorance or total, complete knowledge such a search is impossible or unnecessary. But whereas White has Plato reject one horn of the dilemma as false, Irwin has him nose between the two. While ignorance makes inquiry impossible and knowledge makes it unnecessary, true belief redeems inquiry and makes it possible. What we need to initiate inquiry are enough true beliefs about x to fix the reference of the term "x" so that when the inquiry is completed, we can see that we are still referring to the same thing. What disarms the paradox is the explicit distinction between knowledge and true belief made at 97e-98b and the implicit employment of that distinction earlier in the dialogue with the slave-boy.

One important feature of Irwin's account is that Plato's answer to the paradox does not come in the doctrine of recollection. It comes first in the discussion with the slave-boy where the boy answers with true beliefs that are his own. These beliefs involve specifications that are not knowledge. The recollection thesis is not Plato's solution to the paradox. It is one explanation -- and not necessarily the best one -- of how the boy can answer the way that he does, with these true beliefs, but the real solution to the paradox comes in that answering,

with what Irwin calls "quasi-recollection," and with those beliefs. In short, the paradox is solved by a fact and not by a theory, and that fact is belief and the way in which it can be employed to get inquiry started and carry it through to its completion.

BACK TO THE MENO

A careful reading of the Meno, especially that passage (85b8-86b4) in which Plato describes what had taken place in the interrogation of the slave-boy and draws inferences from that description, gives us a view of the text that is indebted to these interpretations but not wholly like any one of them.

Let us do two things. First, let us consider where Moravcsik, White, et al. are correct and where the text shows them to be wrong. Secondly, we should look at the passage just mentioned to assess what it contributes to our understanding how Plato in fact does solve the paradox.

First, White, Moravcsik, and Irwin are surely right to restrict the paradox to purposive inquiry or directed search. Socrates' reformulation of the dilemma and his own dialectical interests encourage this restriction, as does the interrogation of the slave-boy, which is simply a model of a full Socratic elenchos. This, however, is not only the most important restriction on the type of learning in question; it is also the only restriction. Contra Vlastos and Moravcsik, the evidence that the paradox and the doctrine are solely concerning with the learning of a priori truths is simply not secure. White and Irwin are right in this regard. Not only is it doubtful that Plato would have treated geometrical inquiries as a priori; the formulation of the doctrine of recollection (81c) and the later discussion about true beliefs and knowledge of the road to Larissa show that Plato did not in the Meno yet have in mind what would later come to be treated as a distinction between empirical and a priori truths. The fact that something of this order is already present in Parmenides' poem does not by itself entail that Plato, at this point in his career, had appropriated it, nor does the further fact that by the time he had written the Phaedo he had done so. To assume so is to disregard the possibility of serious intellectual development on Plato's part.

Secondly, the absence of the restriction to a priori knowledge in the Meno is matched by but perhaps not related to the absence of the separated Forms of Plato's middle dialogues, and the separated Forms are certainly missing from the Meno. It is not decisive of course that the nomenclature for the Forms is not present in the Meno. What is decisive are the facts that the objects of belief and knowledge can be the same and that they are spoken of as in the soul. What are recalled as the result of directed inquiry, contra Vlastos, White, et al., are truths, i.e., true accounts that answer what-is-x questions, theorems, and similar statements. We shall have more to say about these

truths, their role and nature. For the moment, it is sufficient to notice that later Plato will indeed allude to the Meno account of recollection -- in the Phaedo and Republic especially -- in ways that locate Forms in it. But without decisive evidence in favor of such an interpretation, we should be reluctant to take Plato's word, as it were; he would surely not be the last philosopher to read his more developed views into his own earlier writings. It is in the Phaedo and not earlier that the doctrine of learning as recollection, adopted previously, is adjusted to suit the requirements of a newly developed metaphysical view and specifically the existence of the Forms.

Thirdly, the burden Irwin places on belief is too great for it to bear. In the Meno, the difference between believing and knowing is a difference in our activity of answering questions correctly when called upon to do so and in general of affirming the truth of a statement when such affirmation is called for. True believing and knowledge are both directed to truths; they differ because the one who merely believes what is true has not yet worked out fully for himself why the truth is true and so will not reliably affirm that truth when the situation calls upon him to do so. The result of learning is not merely true believing, although even at that stage the learner does have the truth in mind. Real learning, as Plato explicitly says, is completed only when the truth is so firmly fixed in the learner's mind that he will always, reliably affirm it when the situation calls for its affirmation. Furthermore, if belief solves the paradox, then why does Socrates continue with his description cum argument after 85b8-c8? If Irwin is right, the doctrine of recollection is artistic trapping and not serious philosophy, for, as he says, the paradox is solved by the phenomenon of quasi-recollection; the doctrine of recollection is merely one possible explanation of how that quasi-recollection takes place. Irwin does not say, in addition, that as a religious explanation it is fanciful and not to be taken seriously, but he might very well have thought it.

Fourthly, while Irwin is wrong about the role of belief in Plato's solution to the paradox, he is more right than White is about Plato's general strategy. Plato solves the dilemma not by grabbing one horn and rejecting the other but rather by either grasping both or nosing between them. This is a matter of Socratic and Platonic style. White's interpretation gives us a different Plato and one whose solution is rather inexplicable and arbitrary. For White cannot really explain why Plato would have thought that having a prior specification is not knowledge in the case of recollection whereas it is knowledge in the case of inquiry. We are not really shown why Plato should have taken this to be a solution at all. White's analysis depends on the supposition that Plato would have thought that having a specification in the case of directed recollection would not count as knowledge. But the crucial kind of recollection, for Plato, is not directed or purposive. Even if to learn is to recall, it is hardly the case that trying to learn is trying to recall.

Finally, Moravcsik is mistaken to think that learning is only like recollection. At 85c-d Plato moves from his account that the beliefs were in the boy to the conclusion that knowledge is in him -- which must mean that the truths, i.e., the objects of believing and knowing are in him -- and then to the further conclusion that this is recollection. It is, he says, recovering again knowledge that is already in one's soul. Moravcsik may be right that analyses of recall and learning reveal that they can be interpreted as having an analogous structure. But in the Meno Plato gives no indication that he has that analogous structure in mind. In fact, what he does indicate is that directed inquiry is possible not because it is like recall but because it is in fact a case of recall (85c9-d8). If you have something in your ken, was it possible for you to look for it before you had it without already having it? Only, Plato says, if having it now is having it once again or calling it to mind once again and if the search began with that something already in your mind but not yet in your ken.

All of these recent interpretations of the doctrine of recollection and how it is intended to solve the paradox of inquiry rest on the same foundation. They all agree that the doctrine must be about the epistemological conditions necessary for inquiry and directed learning. This is most vividly present in White and Irwin where the issue is taken to be one of reference and identity of reference and hence how the learner's referential capacities in terms of certain specifications at the outset of inquiry are related to his referential successes at the end. But if, in a sense, Plato is interested in reference, in the learner's thinking of something, he is interested not in its epistemological conditions but rather in its metaphysical ones. He is concerned, that is, about the object of reference and not how the referring gets done. For this mental referring, for Plato, is like any kind of grasping; without an object, it is just a matter of waving the hand. But if at the outset of inquiry, one has the object in one's grasp, then it is unnecessary and perhaps even impossible to look for it. And if not, then where does it come from. In Socrates' reformulation of the paradox, he says of the inquirer that if "he does not know, [then] he does not even know what he is to look for." This means that if he does have what is to be grasped, then how is he to grasp it -- for all this mental grasping goes on in the soul.

One of the keys that unlocks the paradox of inquiry and the doctrine of recollection is the realization that for Plato the objects of true believing and knowing are truths. These truths he detaches from the world and places in the soul, and believing and knowing are grasping truths in one's soul. Inquiry or learning is a matter of searching for these truths, and the paradox of inquiry, to Plato, is a puzzle about how directed searching can succeed. The doctrine of recollection is the doctrine that having a truth does not imply grasping or knowing it but that knowing or grasping it implies and indeed requires having it. Beliefs do not solve the paradox, for true ones are already a

matter of grasping, though tentatively, truths whereas false ones are no better than ignorance. Nor do sufficiently accurate specifications do the job, for the issue is not what directions one takes to getting the grasping or pointing started but rather what is there to be grasped or pointed at. The only thing that will solve the paradox is to show that the truths that are the objects of true believing and knowing are in the soul always, which is just what Plato shows at 85d-86b. The best Platonic image of how the doctrine of recollection is intended to solve the paradox of inquiry comes from Plato himself -- the image of birds in the aviary of the soul and the distinction between having and holding. But the kinship between the Meno and the Theaetetus on this as on other issues has not gone unnoticed by other commentators, nor is it surprising. For the Theaetetus is about what knowledge is, which on the Meno's own principles is a question prior to the question how it is got. And the aviary is proposed as an answer to the problem of how false belief is possible, an answer offered perhaps because it had already served with some satisfaction to explain how true belief and inquiry are possible.

The paradox of inquiry is solved by recognizing that the truths apprehended and affirmed at the culmination of inquiry are always in the soul, always available as objects of our mental grasp. But this boldly metaphysical solution may seem gratuitous. Why require Plato to have introduced an otherwise unattested metaphysical entity when the Forms are at hand? Indeed, what is this thing that he calls "the truth of things [that] is always in the soul?" What is the structure of these truths? What is their nature?

A short answer to these queries would be that Plato simply does not explore or illuminate the ontological status of these truths or their structure. They are introduced to solve a serious epistemological puzzle and are derived by inference from the doctrine of inquiry and learning as recollection, a doctrine appropriated from Orphic lore and tooled to Plato's purposes.

But this is the short answer; more can be said, although it is conjectural and speculative. As Plato begins to explore seriously epistemological matters concerning believing, knowing, their relations and objects, equipped as he is with a Socratic view of the soul as the seat of personality, character, and intellect, he comes to see that the objects of knowing and believing, permanent and stable truths, cannot be in the world. Eventually he will dictate the terms of these objects' status; they will be ungenerated, imperishable, immutable, pure, and so on, all attributes appropriate to the certainty of knowledge. In the Meno, however, he has not yet reached that momentous metaphysical discovery. Here Plato is groping for a solution to a precise puzzle and, if only temporarily, locates truth not in a Platonic heaven but rather in the soul, within the soul's easy reach. Later, in the Theaetetus and Sophist, he will say that a logos is the external expression of a doxa, and in the Parmenides he will propose and then dispose of the suggestion that Forms are

thoughts (noemata) in the soul. Perhaps, then, the Meno's truths are internal sentences or thoughts -- examples surely include true theorems of geometry and true answers to what-is-x questions -- although Plato gives no helpful clues or advice concerning their structure. All of this notwithstanding, the truths in the soul, the objects of true believing and knowing in the Meno, are soon abandoned in favor of the separated Forms, only to resurface in different guises throughout the course of Western philosophy.

In the passage immediately following the interrogation of Meno's slave-boy (85b8-86b4), Plato indicates clearly that this is how he understands what he has written. If we look first at 85b8-c8, we see that in this passage Plato has incorporated an important transition, from a seemingly harmless description of the slave-boy's behavior -- the beliefs are "his own" -- to a potentially serious epistemological and possibly metaphysical claim -- they are "in him" (85c4). And what "in him" must mean at this stage of the dialogue is "not in another," e.g., not in Socrates. The boy's beliefs, that is, are believings about things in him and not about things in another. Later Plato writes that among the beliefs in the boy are true ones (85c6-7), and that if this is so (86a6-7), then what is in him is he aletheia ton onton. "In him" is explicitly said to mean "in the soul" (86b1-2), and so what Meno agrees to ultimately is that the objects of the boy's believing are truths in his soul.

At 85c9-d8 Plato has Socrates use this conclusion, that the objects of believing are in the soul, to generate the conclusion that the boy's "recovering knowledge that is in him [is] recollecting" (85d7). Meno casually accepts the proposal that beliefs, newly aroused like a dream, can be converted into knowledge, for he finds no difficulty in agreeing that once a truth is in the mind, then the transition from believing it to knowing it is not insurmountable. Hence, the boy can be said to "recover the knowledge out of himself" (85d3-4), where "knowledge" clearly refers to the object of the knowing, the truth about the diagonal on the given square. Meno is so casual about accepting the word "recover" that its meaning must be the most obvious. Prior to the boy's being asked a question, a given truth is in his soul but unattended to. When the question is asked, the boy responds by assenting to the truth, first as a belief, later as knowledge. And he does so by grasping again what he already had but only in an unapprehended fashion, and such a grasping again is an act of recovery. This is Socrates' line of reasoning: from belief to knowledge to recovery to recollection, with his attention always on the truths that are the objects of all four.

The final section of this sequel to the slave-boy discussion (85d9-86b5) is exceedingly difficult. In his final speech Socrates recites the conclusions associated with the doctrine of recollection -- that the soul is immortal, that inquiry is recollection, and that one ought to be bold and confident in undertaking inquiry into what one does not presently know (86b1-

4). But while these are the results of this entire stretch of the dialogue, it is far from clear how they are got.

There is a very precise argument developed in this passage. This is the argument:

- (1) Recollection is the recovery of truths which one once knew but which one does not currently apprehend.
- (2) These truths either (a) were grasped or seized at a particular time or (b) were always in one's possession.
- (C) The truth of things is always in our soul.

The conclusion is given in the protasis of a conditional at 86b1-2. In interpreting this argument there are two possibilities, that (C) is the same as (b) or that (C) follows whether (a) or (b) is true. A careful reading of the intermediate dialogue shows, I think, that the latter alternative, though more difficult to see, is indeed the correct one.

If we were to assume that (C) is the same as (2b), then the most natural way to arrive at (C) from (1) and (2) would be to show that (2a) is false. Unfortunately, at 85d12-86a10 Socrates does not do this. The argument of this intervening stretch of dialogue is this:

- (3) If one always had the truths (=2b), then one would also always be a knower.
- (4) If one grasped the truths at a particular time (=2a), that time was when one was not a human being.
- (5) Some true beliefs are in the boy during the time when he is a human being and during the time he is not a human being.
- (6) For all time, the soul is or is not a human being.
- (7) Therefore, the boy's soul has truths for all time (=2b).

The upshot of this line of reasoning, then, is that the boy recalls truths which he once learned only if he always has them. The truths are in his soul for all time, always. It seems to be Socrates' strategy to show that if learning is recollection, then the recollected truths are always in the soul. There is no alternative.

This argument helps us to see what Plato has in mind as the solution to the paradox of inquiry. Consider again step (3): what does it mean to say that "he would also be a knower?" we have argued that Irwin is wrong about the solution to the paradox. While it may be plausible to think that the solution comes at 85c6-7 with so-called quasi-recollection, this is not Plato's solution. But if belief does not make inquiry possible, what does? 85d12 may be the core of the answer to that question. Inquiry is possible only if the boy can recall truths already within him. But he can do this only if he always possessed those truths. The argument we are currently examining shows this to be the only condition for such recollection; one cannot recall something that is not in one's own mind but rather in another's. From the fact that the boy has always possessed these truths, we can infer that in a sense "he is also always a knower." But this disarms the paradox; inquiry is not unnecessary even when one

knows. Indeed, such knowledge is a necessary condition for the possibility of such inquiry, even though the boy, at the same time, is not a knower in the sense that he knows the truths and knows that he knows them. There is here, as it were, no act of knowing at all, only once-having-known and possession. This, I think, is the only kind of knowing that the word ἐπιστήμη (85d12) can refer to.

In this examination of 85b8-86b4 we have shown that Plato first describes the slave-boy's behavior in such a way that it can be said to be a case of recollection and then argues that what is recalled, the truths first believed and eventually known, are always in the soul to be recalled. Plato is concerned about getting inquiry started only in so far as he believes that without the truths present in the inquirer's soul it can neither start nor succeed. It is in this sense that his interest in inquiry is metaphysical and not epistemological; Plato's problem about reference is the referrent and not the referring. Directed inquiry is possible only in so far as that referrent is always in the soul and coming to know it is a matter of recollection.

In some ways the solution I have developed rennovates the traditional view of how Plato solves the eristic puzzle, but it does so, I hope, with greater attention to the details of the text and the course of Plato's reasoning that are carefully examined by more recent commentators. But it has an advantage over the latter whose interpretations require of Plato a more nuanced interest in language and epistemology than the Meno by itself warrants. My interpretation does not require Plato to have distinguished between empirical and a priori truths, nor does it thrust the burden of the solution to belief rather than knowledge. It does not treat the doctrine of recollection as an unnecessary appendage nor as a metaphor but instead sees it as the precise vehicle for identifying those truths whose ongoing presence in the soul ultimately solves the paradox. And finally it takes seriously the discussion following the slave-boy dialogue, at 85b8-86b4, in which important conclusions are drawn from that dialogue and from the doctrine of learning as recollection. To my mind, the emergence of Platonic genius is in large part the emergence of Plato's metaphysical thinking. On the interpretation that I have offered the Meno is a crucial stage in this process, a fact which will, among other things, I hope, recommend it.

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